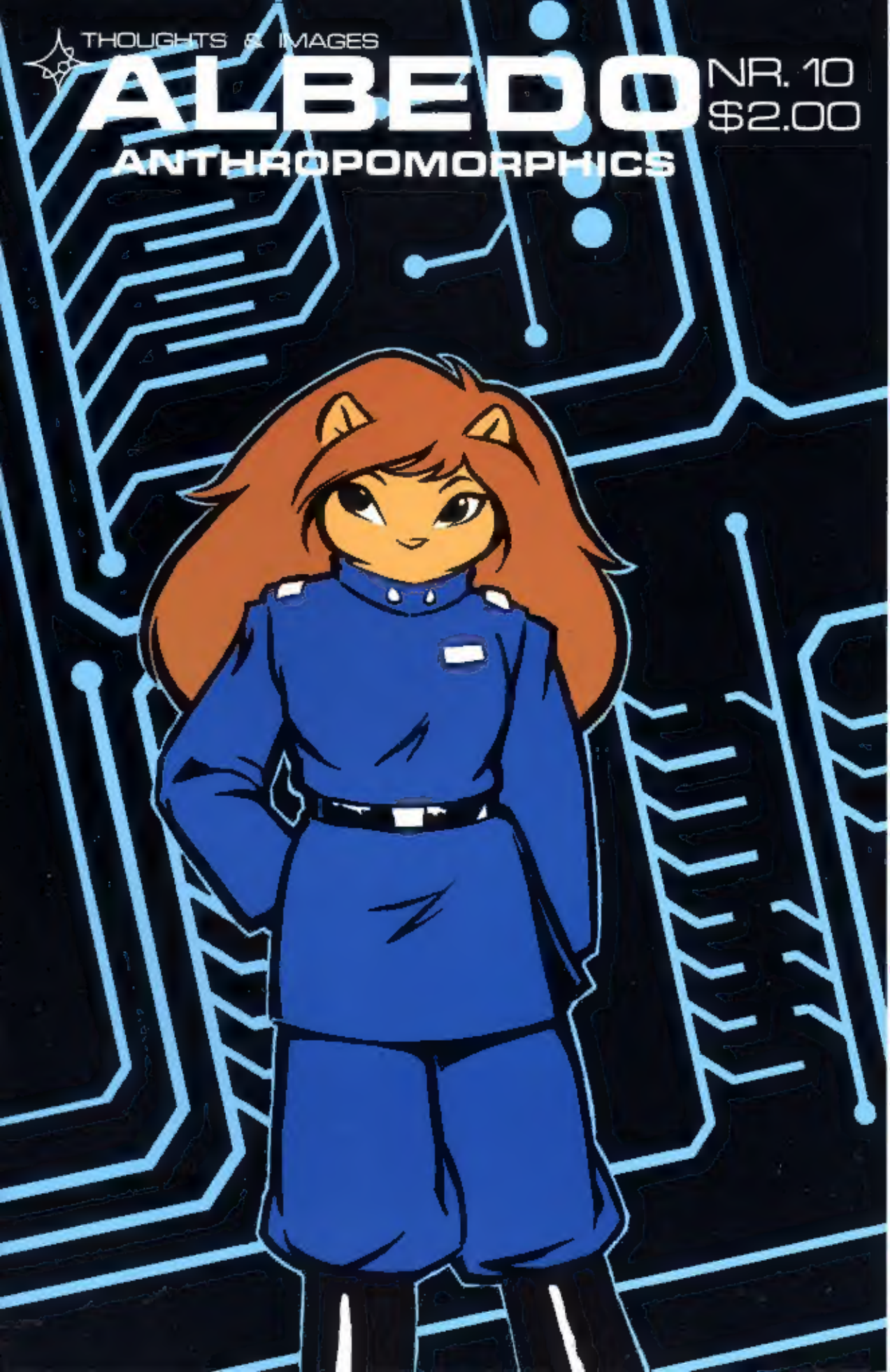
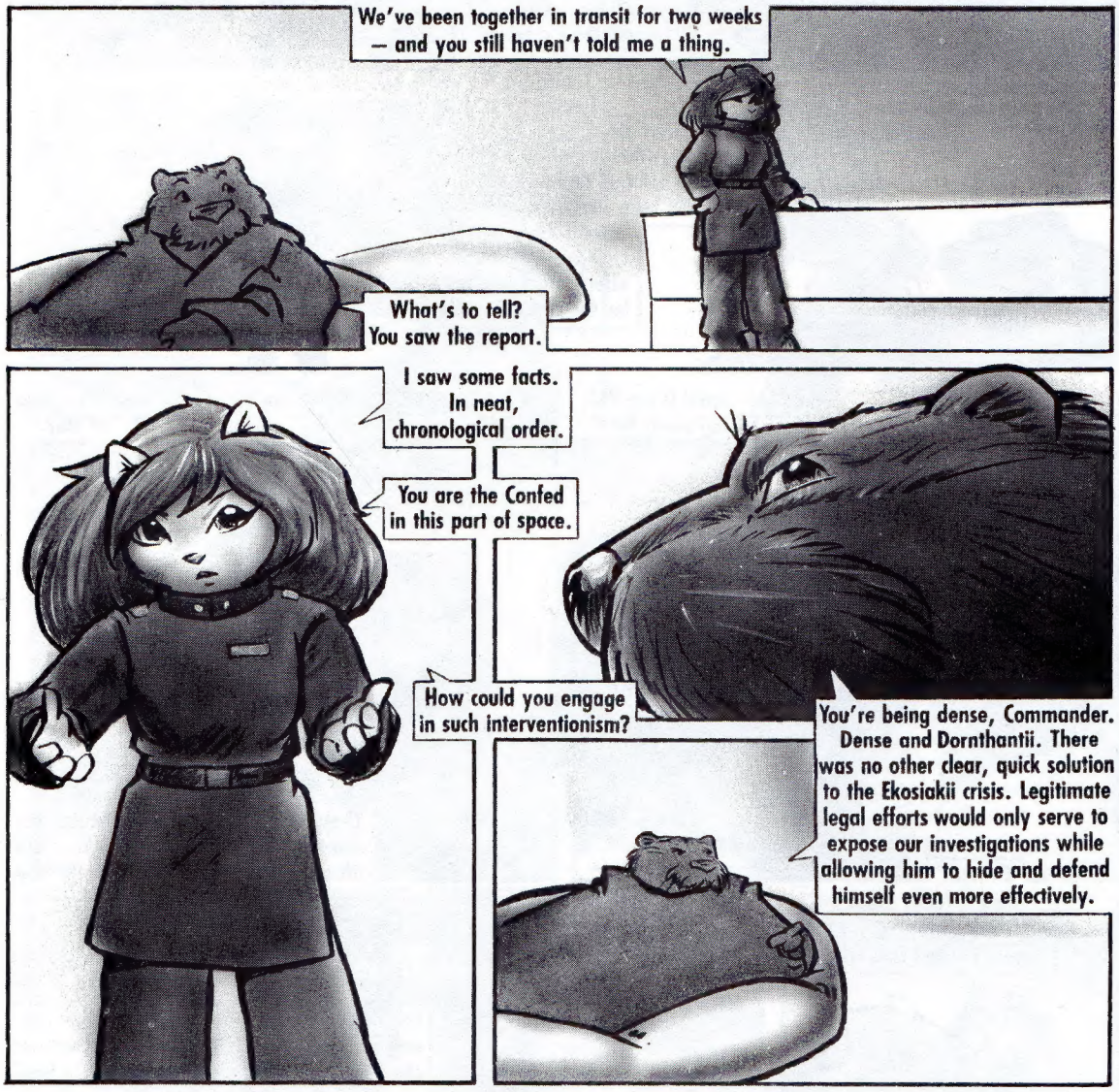

THOUGHTS & IMAGES
ALBEDO
NR. 10
$2.00
ANTHROPOMORPHICS

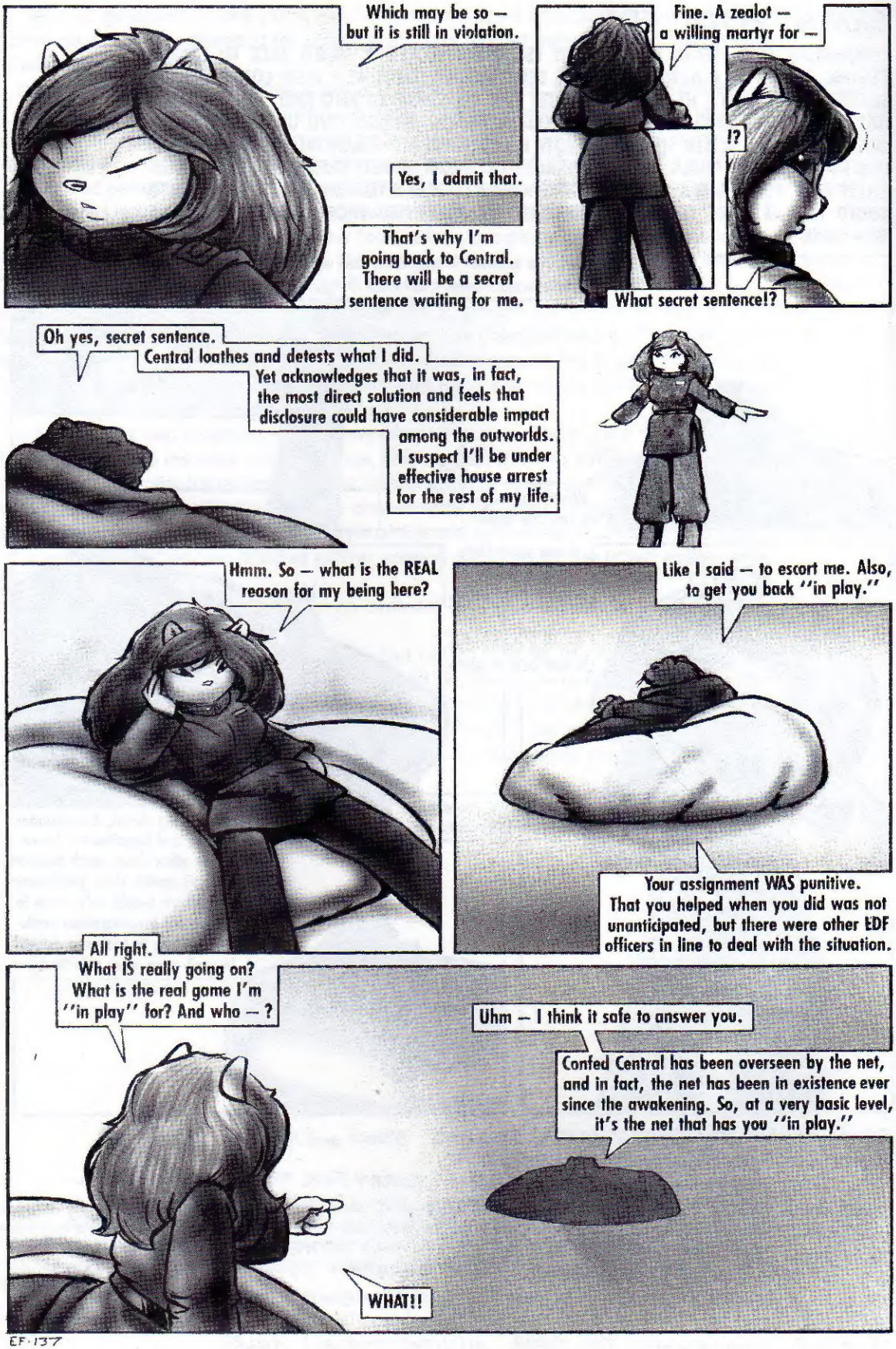
ERMA FELNA, EDF

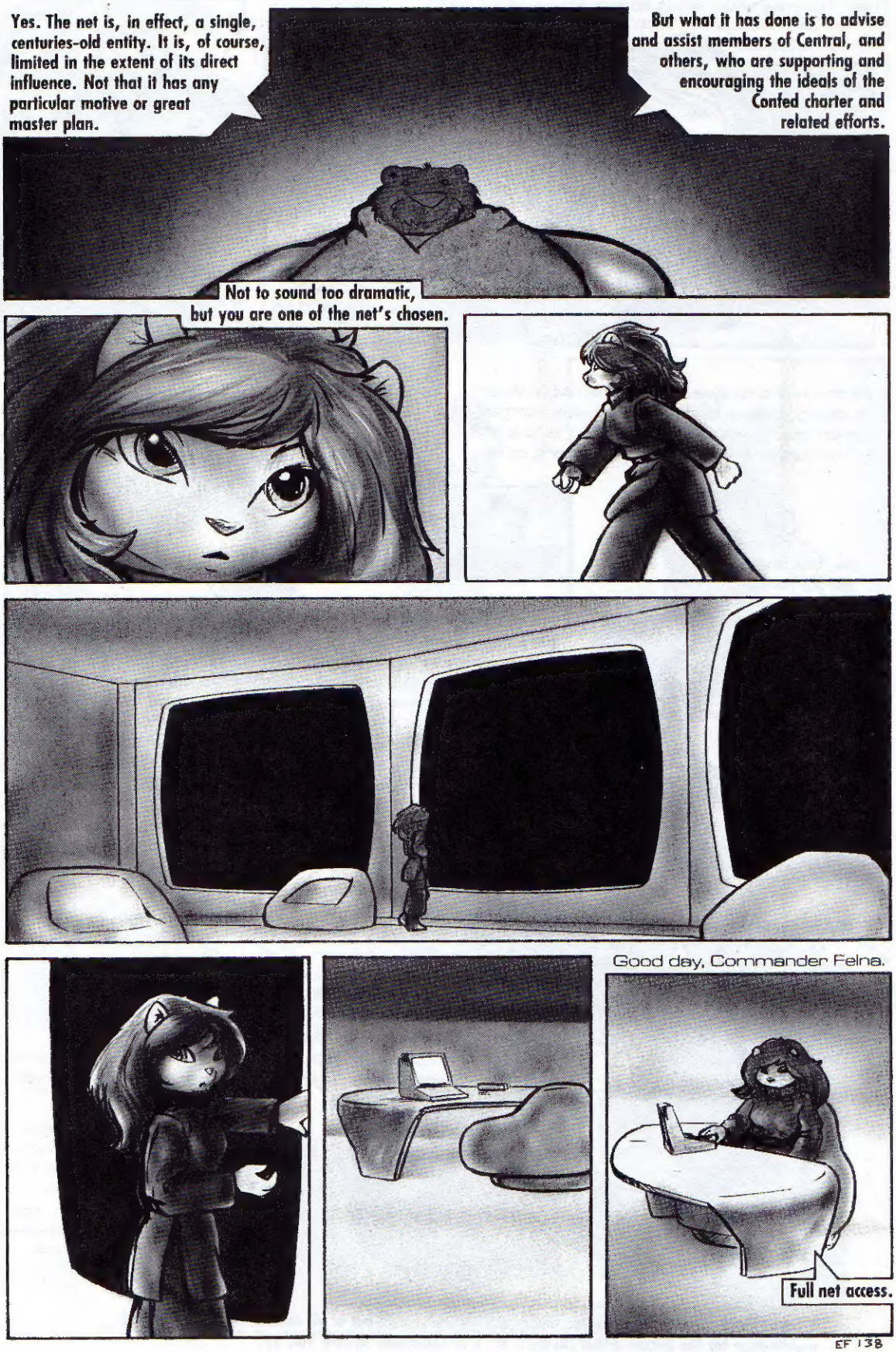
COMMANDER ERMA FELNA IS CURRENTLY ESCORTING SECRETARY SMATO BACK TO CONFED CENTRAL SPACE FOR A NEW POSTING, AS BEFITTING HIS STATUS AS A HIGH CONFED REPRESENTATIVE. IN REALITY, HE IS UNDER ARREST FOR ASSASSINATING AITO KHO, AN AMBITIOUS ANTI-CENTRALIST CORPORATE HEAD WHO HAD INSTIGATED TERRIBLE CIVIL UNREST THROUGHOUT THE EKOSIAKII SYSTEM TO FURTHER BOTH HIS POLITICAL AND FINANCIAL POSITIONS. SMATO HAD MADE THE PLOT PUBLIC AND ENCOURAGED THE MEDIA TO HELP QUELL THE UNREST, THEN KILLED AITO, FEARING THAT THE DISCLOSURE WOULD ONLY BE A TEMPORARY SETBACK, AS AITO COULD NOT BE MADE LEGALLY ACCOUNTABLE OR PREVENTED FROM AGAIN CREATING A NEW CRISIS.



ERMA FELNA, EDF © 1987 STEVE GALLACCI STORY and ART BY STEVE, SOME INKING BY MONIKA LIVINGSTON

LAST MINUTE EDITORIALIZING — SORRY FOR THE TALKING HEADS — THERE WAS A LOT THAT HAD TO BE COVERED AND NO OTHER QUICK WAY — THE HEAVY MORALIZING AND ALL WAS BROUGHT ON BY THE IRAN-CONTRA HEARINGS AND MY FEELINGS ABOUT IT AND OTHER DOUBIOUS GOINGS-ONS IN THE U.S. AND OVERSEAS. I'M A FREEDOM OVER SECURITY KIND OF GUY, ESPECIALLY SINCE "SECURITY" USUALLY MEANS KEEPING THE POWERS THAT BE SECURE FROM SUCH "THREATS" AS CIVIL LIBERTY, LEGAL ACCOUNTABILITY, OR OTHER CHALLENGES TO THEIR AUTHORITARIAN RULE.


Which may be so — but it is still in violation.
Yes, I admit that.
That's why I'm going back to Central. There will be a secret sentence waiting for me.
Fine. A zealot — a willing martyr for —
!?
What secret sentence!?
Oh yes, secret sentence.
Central loathes and detests what I did. Yet acknowledges that it was, in fact, the most direct solution and feels that disclosure could have considerable impact among the outworlds. I suspect I'll be under effective house arrest for the rest of my life.
Hmm. So — what is the REAL reason for my being here?
Like I said — to escort me. Also, to get you back "in play."
Your assignment WAS punitive. That you helped when you did was not unanticipated, but there were other EDF officers in line to deal with the situation.
All right. What IS really going on? What is the real game I'm "in play" for? And who — ?
Uhm — I think it safe to answer you.
Confed Central has been overseen by the net, and in fact, the net has been in existence ever since the awakening. So, at a very basic level, it's the net that has you "in play."
WHAT!!


Yes. The net is, in effect, a single, centuries-old entity. It is, of course, limited in the extent of its direct influence. Not that it has any particular motive or great master plan.
But what it has done is to advise and assist members of Central, and others, who are supporting and encouraging the ideals of the Confed charter and related efforts.
Not to sound too dramatic, but you are one of the net's chosen.
Good day, Commander Felna.
Full net access.

Yes? I suspect you want to talk to me about your discussion with Shato and concerns about your future.

Uhm — yes.

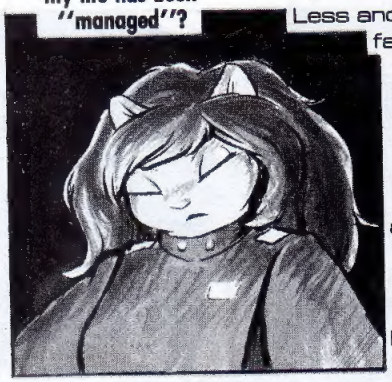
Very well. What he said was substantially true.

The net has actively participated in affecting the personal fortunes of those individuals who stand to best serve the "cause."

First, I want to assure you that while what is being done is technically outside normal parameters, with a few exceptions, it is still accountable within the general intent of law.

Now, as for your participation in all this, at no time has it been our intention to operate you as a robot; rather, we want to encourage your talents and have you in a position to best exercise them.

So, how much of my life has been "managed"?



Less and more. How much impact is there in little acts? Encouraging a favorable bias on the part of an instructor, deflecting a negative bias in an administrator's staff selection. A hundred little variables that might affect the advancement of the truly deserving. The system is supposed to be egalitarian, but even with the net, it rarely is. Your father's generation was one of idealism. The EDF was young and made of young bright individuals determined to do good. Most did. But with peace, a few saw opportunities for privilege and have allowed decisions to be made for reasons other than those old ideals. Your selection as an EDF officer had more to do with rival factions for and against your father than what was known about your particular performance. The net, recognizing your true potential, adjusted the odds. Others, like Tavas,* have risen to power despite the net's best efforts.

TAVAS!? What do you — oh — yes, I see.

Yes, or your brother.

Uhm?

He has been rejected for EDF service.

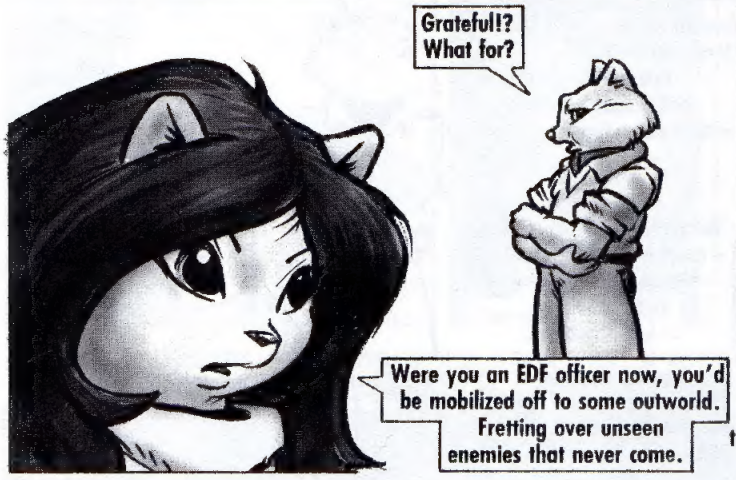
Why? His scolastic —.

You know why. His classroom performance is exemplary, even better than yours, by a fair margin. But his psychological profile is completely unsuitable.

And despite the best efforts of sometimes well meaning individuals who feel that he should be the Felna of this generation in service — yes, sexism is another factor — the net is determined that he will never wear the colors of the EDF.

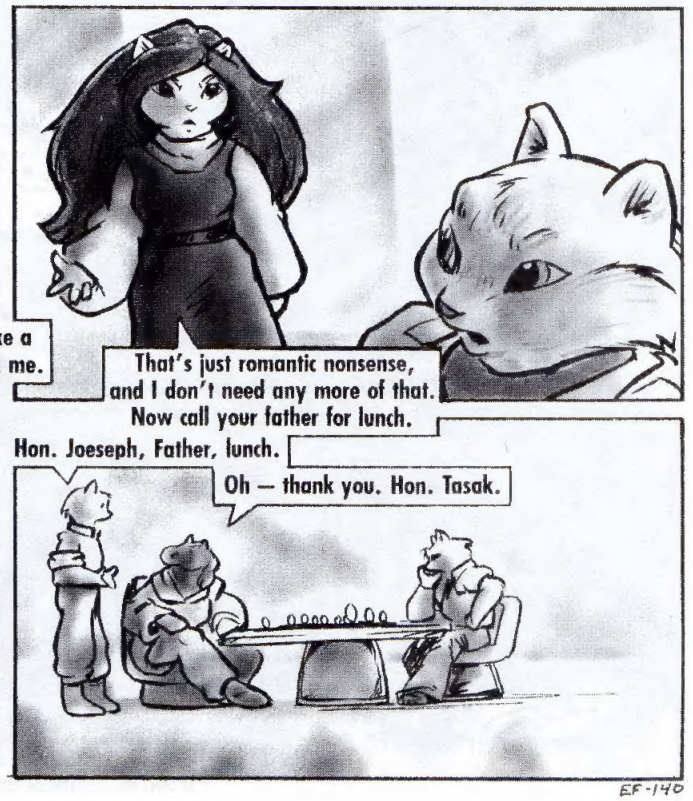
*** Tavas Ikalik, Erma's former lover, had suddenly transferred out of his combat unit on the eve of mobilization for the Derzon action (ALBEDO nr. 1 or Command Review Vol. 1).**

But it's not fair!
I think you should be grateful.


Grateful!? What for?
Were you an EDF officer now, you'd be mobilized off to some outworld. Fretting over unseen enemies that never come.

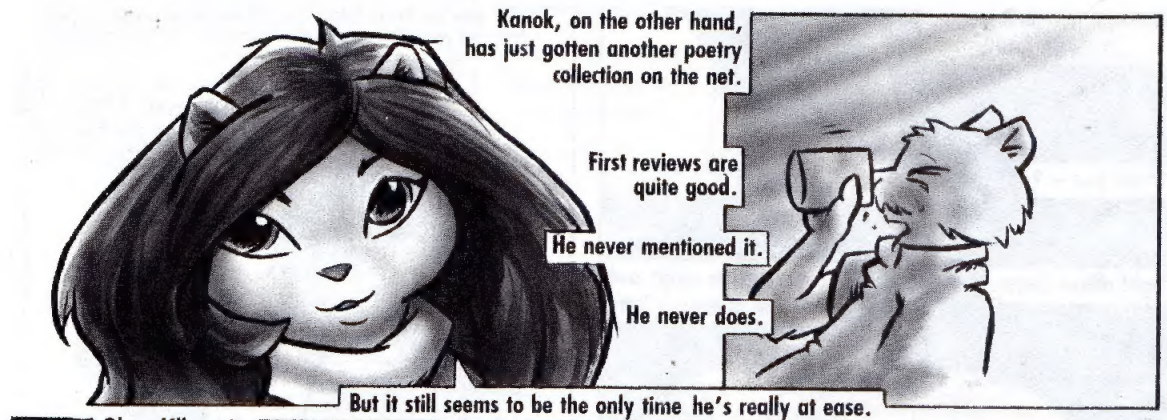
Yeah — or out fighting real enemies — the Republicans! The way Erma did. As a home guard here I'll never see any action at all!

What for? And end up like your father? Or simply dead?
Why not — if I can take a pile of Republicans with me.

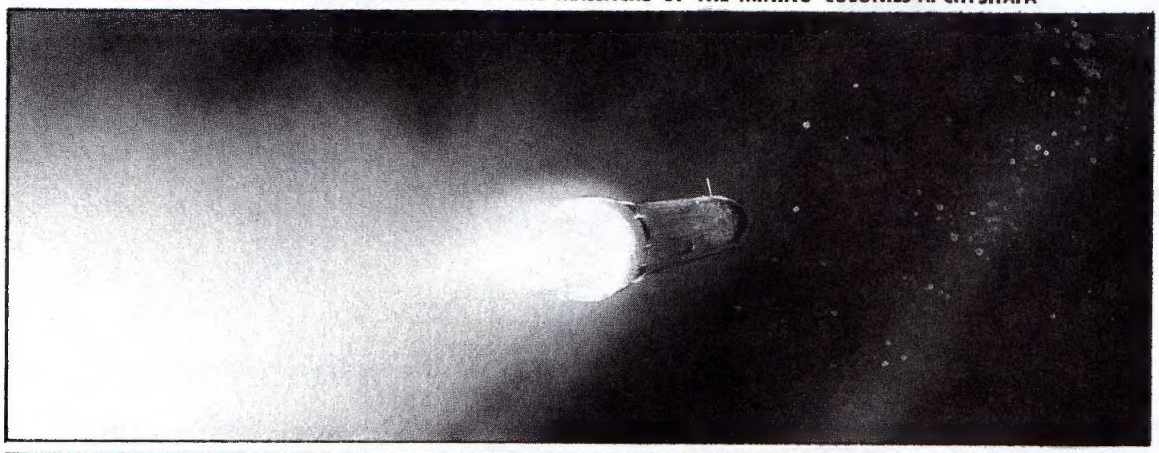

That's just romantic nonsense, and I don't need any more of that. Now call your father for lunch.
Hon. Joeseph, Father, lunch.
Oh — thank you. Hon. Tasak.

Father?
Uhmmm?
Lunch is ready.
You hungry, Kanok?
—food—
—hungry?
Did you know that there's a hunger simulation? All the sensation, pain, that comes with it. Instantly and for as long as desired.
—no physical signs—
—no long waits—
Just a little shot, and a little electricity.
—instant starvation—
—like weeks of empty bellies—
—maybe a touch of thirst—
—electrolyte imbalance—
swollen tongue
— hallucinations.
All that talk perks up my appetite; how's about some lunch?
Yeah, a relaxing bite.
How was the game?
Brilliant. Though he began to "flash" when Tasak came down.
So, how's the writing?
I'm in the middle of an academic work — a sort of statistical analysis of linguistic shift in colonial generations.

EF·141

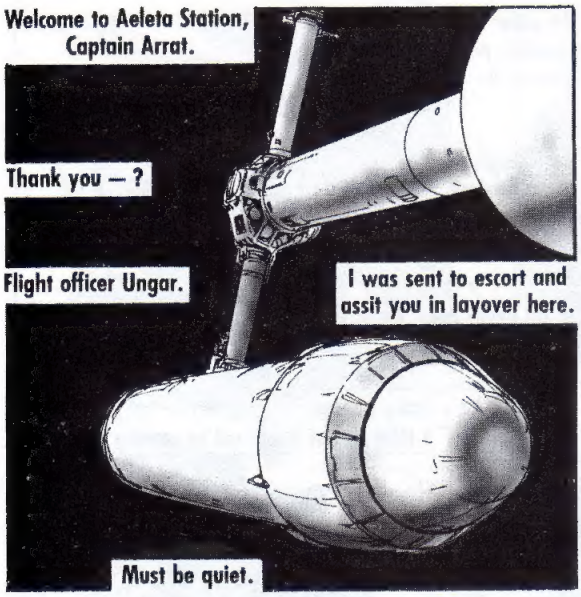


THE DH-270 DECELERATES TO THE AEOSTAH SYSTEM, WHERE IT WILL BE REFITTED AFTER SUFFERING DAMAGE BY A STILL UNKNOWN SHIP WHICH PARTICIPATED IN THE MASSACRE OF THE MINING COLONIES AT CHISHATA



NOT ONLY DID THE SHIP SUFFER DAMAGE AND CASUALTIES IN AN EXCHANGE OF FIRE, OTHER CREW MEMBERS WERE LOST TO DIABOLICAL TRAPS SET TO HAMPER ATTEMPTS TO RESCUE THE COLONISTS (ALBEDO nrs. 3 and 4 or Command Review Vol. 1)

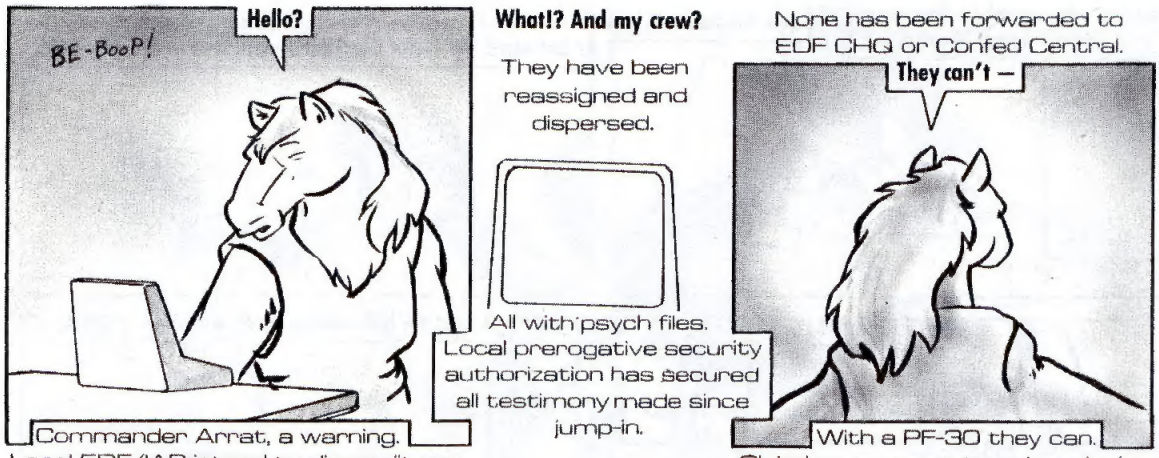
EF-142

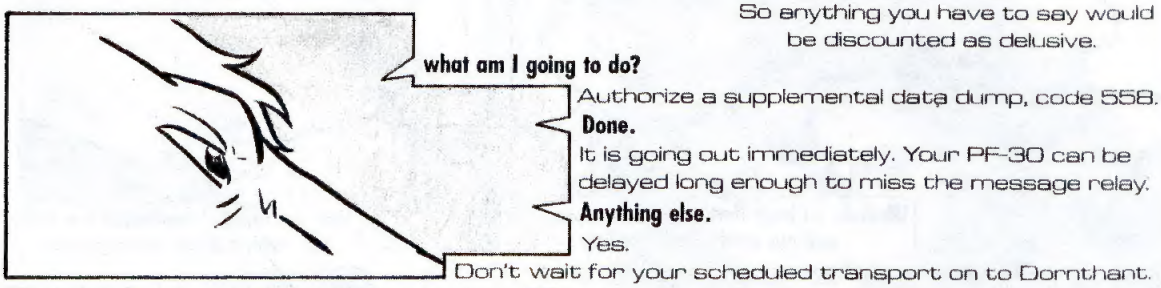


Even without the net, the outworlds are all hot over our ''inaction' and subsequent overreaction at Derzon.

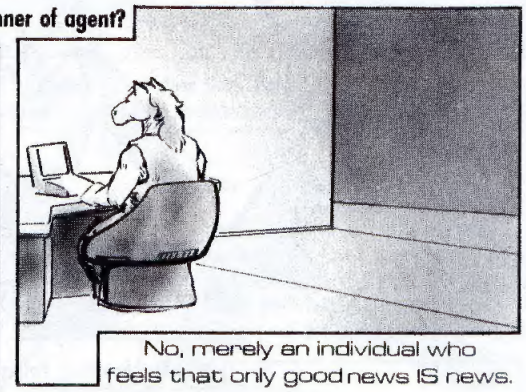
Giving him an unfavorable psych would prevent anyone from taking him too seriously — especially since his father had a psych discharge.

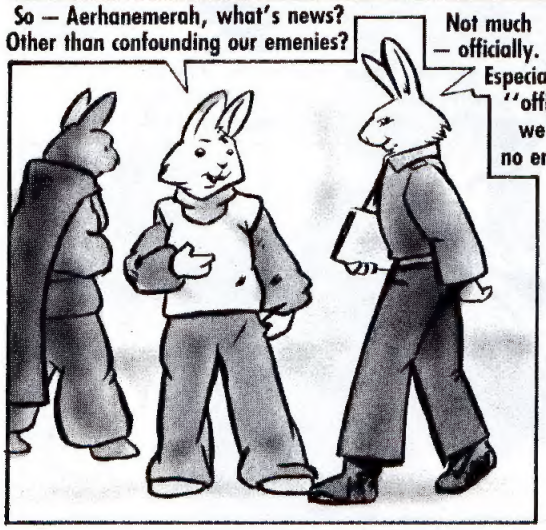
EF·143

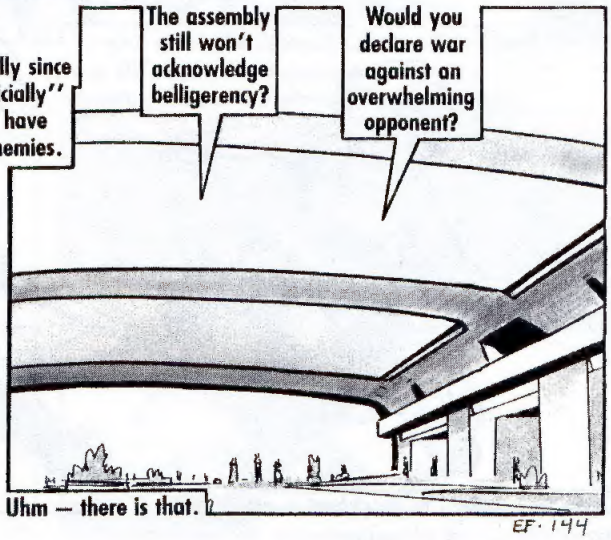

Hello?
BE-BOOP!
Commander Arrat, a warning.
Local EDF/IAP intend to discredit you with a PF-30 psych evaluation.
What!? And my crew?
They have been reassigned and dispersed.
All with psych files.
Local prerogative security authorization has secured all testimony made since jump-in.
None has been forwarded to EDF CHQ or Confed Central.
They can't —
With a PF-30 they can.
Claiming you were too close, losing objectivity to the problem.
So anything you have to say would be discounted as delusive.

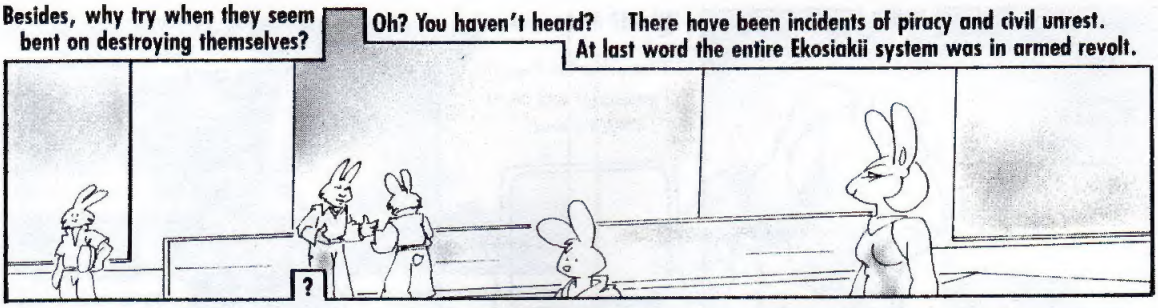

what am I going to do?
Authorize a supplemental data dump, code 558.
Done.
It is going out immediately. Your PF-30 can be delayed long enough to miss the message relay.
Anything else.
Yes.
Don't wait for your scheduled transport on to Dornthant.
There is a commercial vessel leaving within 30 hours.

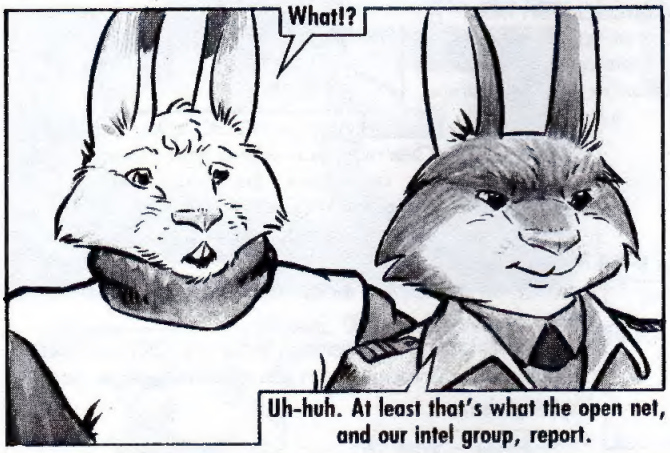
You suspect something? Is he some manner of agent?

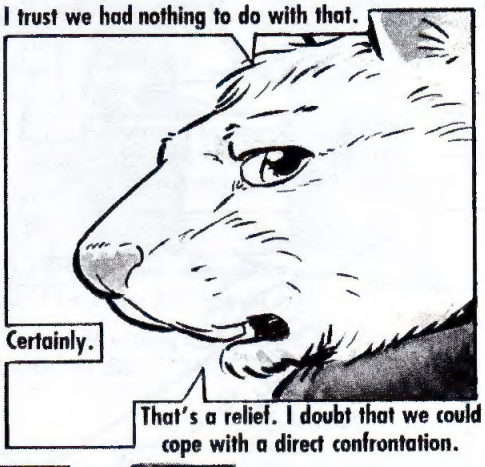

No, merely an individual who feels that only good news IS news.

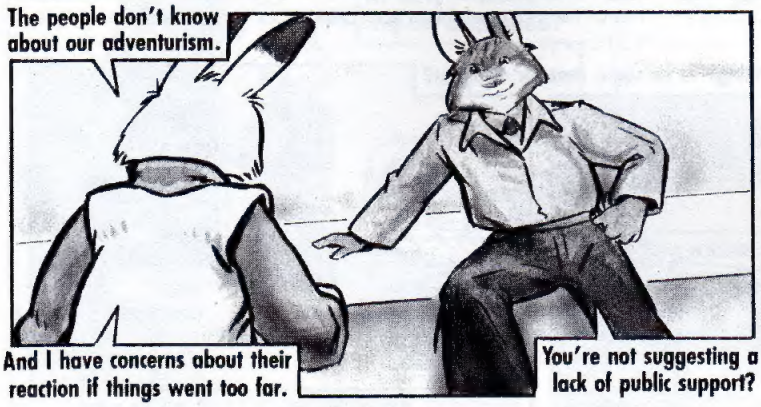

So — Aerhanemerah, what's news? Other than confounding our emenies?
Not much — officially.
Especially since "officially" we have no enemies.

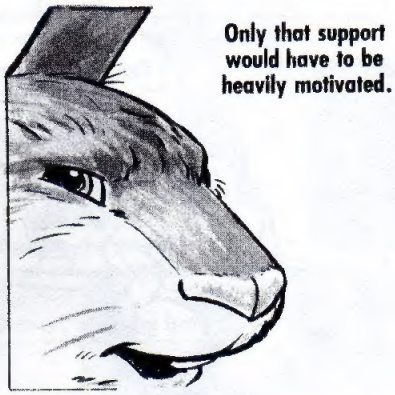

The assembly still won't acknowledge belligerency?
Would you declare war against an overwhelming opponent?
Uhm — there is that.

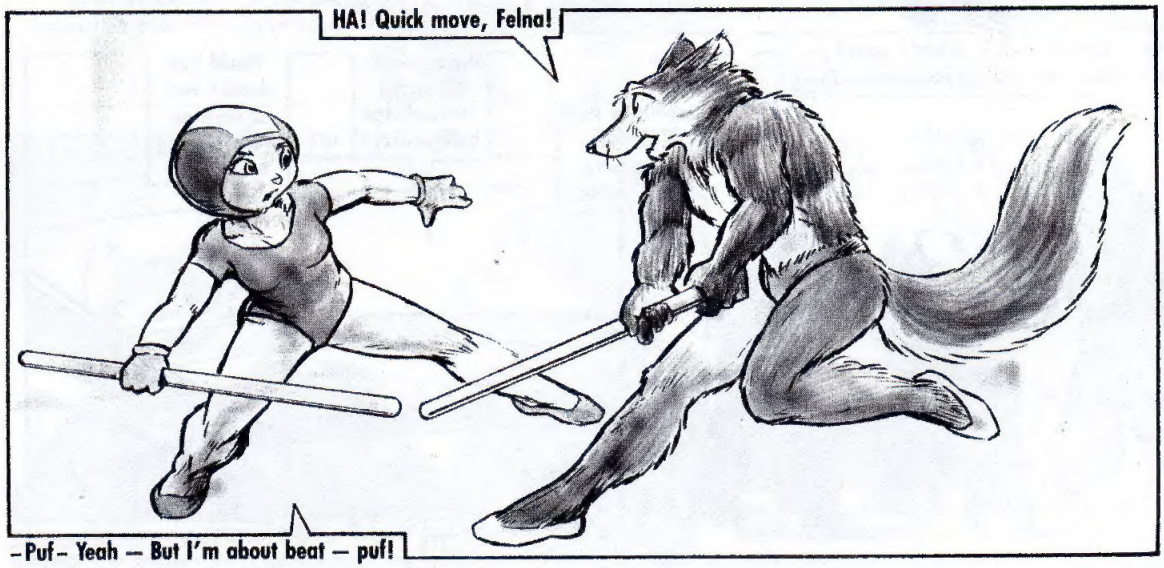

Besides, why try when they seem bent on destroying themselves?
Oh? You haven't heard? There have been incidents of piracy and civil unrest. At last word the entire Ekosiakii system was in armed revolt.
?


What!?
Uh-huh. At least that's what the open net, and our intel group, report.


I trust we had nothing to do with that.
Certainly.
That's a relief. I doubt that we could cope with a direct confrontation.


The people don't know about our adventurism.
And I have concerns about their reaction if things went too far.
You're not suggesting a lack of public support?


Only that support would have to be heavily motivated.


HA! Quick move, Felna!
-Puf- Yeah -- But I'm about beat -- puf!

EF·145

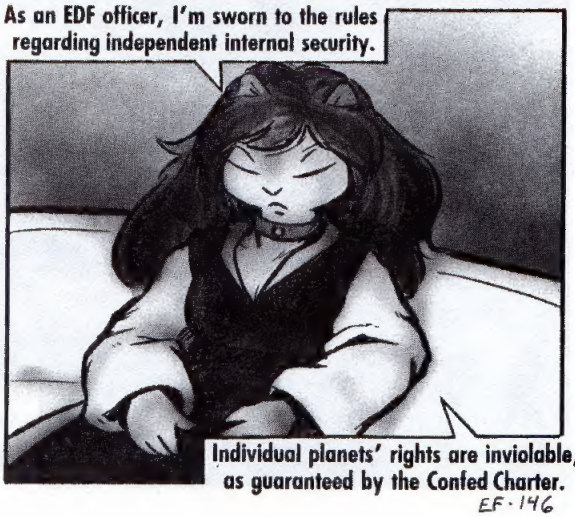
Not bad, flight officer.
You mean — not bad FOR a flight officer.
And I notice that you're not bad for a businessman!

Was home guard — now reserve.
On Konattahtzah, from the sound.

Al! And you Dornthantii.

I'm not a centralist, but feel that more uniform control could be maintained.
At what level? Like Otkawa? Dornthant? Or Echak?

I've dealt with nearly every major planet in space, and it seems inconceivable that any kind of consensus can be made on internal security. What do you say?
Yeah, let's hear a Dornthantii view.


As an EDF officer, I'm sworn to the rules regarding independent internal security.
Individual planets' rights are inviolable, as guaranteed by the Confed Charter.

EF·146

Come on — as a CITIZEN you must be sick and tired of the inconsistency. Too many planets allowing intolerable liberties, all but encouraging open dissent. Havens of sedition and lawlessness. The Charter wasn't intended for that. Better we maintain order than allow such to continue.

WHAT!? How — How can you say that!?

Do you want to jeopardize the better part of what the Confederation stands for?

I'm sorry, but good night!

What's her problem? I'd thought a Dornthantii would go for Law and Order.

Enforcement of an arbitrary code would virtualy demand a dictatorship. I'm shocked that you'd want privileged security over general individual liberty.

I think you overstated yourself a bit. She's EDF, and they regard the charter as inviolable.

Because you defend the charter, though you fear you may be compromising it with your involvement with me? I won't try to reassure you. Nor attempt to thwart you if you choose to reveal me.

I feel like such a hypocrite.

I only ask that you consider the full impact of such. Which of course is my not-so-subtle way of taking advantage of your sense of duty to the general intent of the charter rather than its word.